

A VISIONPOINT PERSPECTIVE

Training at the Point-of-Change:

Strategies for a Change-Responsive Workforce



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Fast & Flexible Training Solutions

Within the span of a decade, the breadth of change, the magnitude of change and the rate of change all have increased exponentially. The resulting impact is all pervasive, affecting the lives of individuals, organizations, communities and institutions as never before. Nowhere has the impact been felt more than in the modern workforce.

Around the world, millions of jobs and tasks done one way yesterday now need to be done differently today—no exceptions, no excuses. Changes in strategies, business models, products, technologies and markets send ripples through the workplace. Mergers and acquisitions, hiring trends, downsizing and globalization send shockwaves. No organization goes untouched.

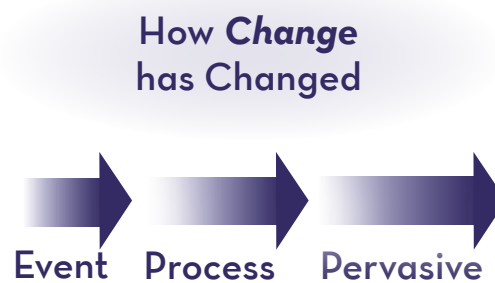
At the same time, there is more geographic, cultural and generational diversity in the workforce than ever before. Against the backdrop of constant change, an increasingly diverse mix of employees is being asked to work together seamlessly and to adapt quickly and efficiently to whatever comes its way, all with minimal disruptions to productivity. For organizations today, change is always present. The implications—and the complications—are significant.

Rethinking Change and Change Management

While the nature of change itself has taken on a dramatically new dimension, the philosophies, methods and tools for dealing with change in the workplace have not kept pace. The practice of **change management** came to prominence in the 1970s as a formalized approach to the management of human behavior during and after change. In the decades that followed, organizational change was regarded primarily as an event in time or, perhaps, as a finite initiative. Given this perspective, the impetus behind change management for most organizations was to “put change behind us” as quickly as possible and get back to business more-or-less as usual. Change, however, had a way of coming back sooner, more often and more insistently than anyone had anticipated.

Against this backdrop, change management grew into a multi-billion dollar industry. Organizations embraced the latest change management processes and launched hundreds of large-scale change initiatives intended to help the workforce better accept or adjust to the next change. Despite an explosion in resources, information and training, there has been scant evidence of success. By some estimates, up to 70 percent of change initiatives fail to get off the ground, grind to a halt in mid-stream or never achieve their stated goals. (Dr. John Kotter,

CLO Newsletter, 3.3.08.)



It is time to consider whether the traditional notion of change management has become outmoded. In an era when change has evolved from event, to process to constant state of flux, the key question is not whether an organization is capable of managing change, but whether it can actually *manage to change*.

- Can it leverage its workforce to revitalize a maturing market?
- Can it modify its customer service practices and procedures to recapture customers taking their accounts to other suppliers?
- Can it slash costs by transforming the way individual employees operate within its business model?
- Can it execute the cultural as well as operational aspects of a merger successfully to become an industry leader?

*Success is no longer achieved through the capacity to manage change;
it demands the capacity to manifest it.*

The Business of Change is Personal

Organizations don't change unless the majority of the people who comprise them change first—one mind and one heart at a time. This is the quintessential *point-of-change* in every organization . . . where individuals become willing to respond proactively and participate supportively in dealing with changes and challenges in their workplace. It is reflected in personal choices; choices of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors; choices to let go of the familiar, the comfortable, the routine; choices to adopt new ways of working. The point-of-change is where inspiration begets innovation, where caring becomes memorable customer service, where tenacity turns into competitiveness. Only by achieving critical mass at the point-of-change—that is, at the individual employee level—can an organization actually manage to change.

Conventional efforts to manage change have, literally, missed the point. Rearranging boxes on the organizational chart, staging rah-rah gatherings and training employees to buy into a change rarely reflect the realities of what it takes to manifest change in the workplace. In order to increase an organization's overall capacity to change, responding to change must become a core capability of each member of the workforce.

Training at the point-of-change is how to most effectively develop this capability. It involves equipping individual employees with personal insight and practical skills to reshape how they experience change. As training takes root, a change-responsive workforce begins to emerge. Employees instinctively know the right questions to ask, the appropriate steps to take and the things to avoid doing when opportunities for change present themselves.

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The Business of Change is Personal (cont'd)

This training strategy delivers genuine business benefits by:

- **Preventing employees and the organization from getting stuck in “victim mode”**
Feeling helpless and/or powerless in the face of workplace change paralyzes individuals from taking the actions necessary to accomplish successful change.
- **Replacing passive-aggressive behavior with shared accountability for success**
Through open and honest communications, all employees engage in critical conversations about their responsibilities and contributions to successful change.
- **Helping bring about necessary employment shifts/departures among those unable to embrace change**
One acceptable outcome of the process is for individual employees to realize that they do not want to continue working in a “post-change” workplace.
- **Empowering those employees who are eager for change to be part of the solution**
Individuals with no qualms about change simply want accurate information, clear expectations and practical tools to “get on with their lives” in the workplace.
- **Increasing the organization’s capacity to handle change faster and more effectively over time; i.e., creating an “agile” workforce**
When a workforce handles change without missing a beat, the organization as a whole becomes increasingly nimble in responding to competitive threats and market opportunities.

By recognizing where change actually occurs (the point-of-change) and embedding specialized personal competencies within the workforce (training at the point-of-change), organizations have the means to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

Dissecting Change

“Getting under the hood” of workplace change is key to understanding how individuals react to and experience change. It also is the necessary first step in creating a change-responsive workforce.

Although change unfolds in a multitude of ways, it consists of two primary categories. First is the kind of change that is **imposed** on the workforce and/or the people in it. This type of change is non-negotiable, leaving employees with little say about what is happening. Examples include major shifts in organizational direction or strategy, overhauls of policies and procedures, revamps of technology/software and, of course, downsizing.

The second type of change is **participative**. The individual employee and the combined workforce have roles in planning and implementing specific aspects of change. The chief characteristic is the *(continued on pg. 6)*



Food for Thought: Change Re-Framed

Training at the point-of-change reflects a profound shift in the conventional wisdom surrounding change. Historically, the primary orientation has been that employees typically are resistant to change. Feeling threatened by change, some simply refuse to acknowledge the need to do things differently, continuing to operate as they always have until change initiatives fade away. Alternately, other employees appear to be passive resistant, paying lip service to change while doing what they can to continue as if nothing was different.

Today, the assumption that employees are change resistant no longer holds true. Instead there is growing acknowledgement that everyone experiences change in his or her own way along a broad spectrum of normal reactions and responses. At one end of the spectrum are individuals who initially respond with fear and anxiety; at the other end are those who are curious and excited, with countless combinations in between. The emotional, mental, physical and behavioral reactions individuals have when facing change impact their ability to adapt successfully. Their reactions also can affect those around them, generating repercussions across the entire organization.

Added to the mix are the impacts of a quickly growing multi-generational workforce. Members of Gen X, Gen Y and GenNext all have demonstrated themselves to be significantly different from earlier generations in how they regard change. Younger members of today's workforce not only expect change, they thrive on it. These employees are hungry for information about pending change and want to know what is required from them to make it happen. Such change-seekers can become frustrated in organizations they perceive to be slow to change.

On a broader scale, change has become a greater part of the mainstream, impacting every aspect of modern life. In general, the experience of living in an increasingly dynamic society requires higher tolerance and new strategies for change. The notion of digging in one's heels to fight change is an increasingly untenable position. Against this historical backdrop, resistance to change is no longer a dominant trait of today's workforce.

Examples of Change Re-Framed	
Original Frame	New Frame
Viewing organizations & people as victims of change (<i>change happens to me</i>)	Organizations & people take an active role in change (<i>change happens through me</i>)
All employees are resistant to change	Employees have a wide range of responses to change; e.g., resisting, expecting, embracing
Forcing change upon employees with little or no opportunity for engagement	Approaching change as a decision making process by individual employees at all levels of the organization

By changing the frame (i.e., shifting the training orientation from change resistance to change responsiveness) organizations improve their critical capacity to change.

Dissecting Change (cont'd)

(continued from pg. 4) involvement of employees in making decisions and taking action needed to bring about change; e.g., accepting additional job responsibilities, establishing processes needed to accomplish new tasks and implementing imposed change.

In the case of participative change, individuals can influence how the organization will implement a specific change and address its impacts. Determining what to say, as well as how to say it effectively and to whom, are all teachable skills that will lead to employees sharing the responsibility and accountability for success.

Within these two categories, change also has different magnitudes—it is not all alike. For example, a change can be as massive and complex as a merger or acquisition or it can be comprised of constant and dynamic issues that occur on a daily basis; e.g., customers making changes to project specifications.

Labels and categories notwithstanding, workplace change is unique and multi-faceted. It takes on a variety of forms, sizes and intensities and often is driven by a complex set of factors. The ability to slice-and-dice it into its component parts and identify its characteristics is vital to understanding its impact on the organization and the people who comprise it. As individuals learn the nuances of change in all its forms, they come to appreciate the variability of their own reactions and those of others in the workplace.

This sets the stage for each employee to perform a measured assessment of change. Through more thoughtful individual responses and more timely action on the part of each member of the workforce, the more effectively the organization can manage to change.

Getting to Yes—or to No—on Change

When faced with change, the bottom line for individual employees is coming to terms with the anticipated impacts on their livelihoods, their workplace relationships and their families. Rarely, of course, are all the details available. As a consequence, employees often struggle with determining what steps they could or should be taking, or even what questions to ask. In the absence of pertinent and specific information, they may have difficulty understanding their new roles and responsibilities. This can result in slowing down the pace of change, stalling it in its tracks or preventing it from happening at all. Few, if any, organizations can afford to take these risks.

The stakes, in fact, are becoming absolute for more and more organizations every year: change or die. For those that want to ensure their survival, there is a clear solution—training at the point-of-change. This involves two key components: (1) communicating the rationale for change; and (2) providing a strategy or process to help employees work through logical steps in responding to change. Organizations must realize that employees can actually sabotage a change initiative if they don't buy in, support and participate in the change.

Ideally, a majority of the workforce will reach a “yes” decision on its own to commit fully and re-energize. From full commitment comes the behavior that characterizes a change-responsive workforce—innovation, dedicated customer service and continuous improvement in every corner of the organization. When organizations equip their employees, supervisors and managers to navigate change at a personal level, they provide the necessary catalyst for change.



Summary

From noun to verb—that is the fundamental shift that organizations must embrace in regards to change. Their ability to embody that shift depends on the capacity of their workforces to respond to change. The transformation starts by framing change as a conscious, individual choice that each employee must make for him or herself. Training at the point-of-change is the mechanism through which employees gain personal knowledge about the nature of change and their responses to it, and then acquire the practical skills to thrive in a changing workplace.

Through training focused at the point-of-change, organizations develop workforces that are able to operate effectively no matter how dynamic and challenging their business environments. Agile, thriving organizations are those engaged in building a **change-responsive workforce**, one in which navigating change becomes an essential core competency of every employee.

When individuals are aware of their reactions to change, have skills to make informed decisions regarding change and understand the need to commit to change, they set change in motion. As individuals come to grasp it intellectually, process it emotionally and adopt it behaviorally, change becomes simply “how we do business.”

VisionPoint® is your resource for fast, flexible training solutions in the areas of Ethics & Compliance, Diversity & Respect, Leadership Development and Personal Performance.

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